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Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00
PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 H-01 NSC-05 SS-15
/049 W
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R 301000Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 623
INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 PORT OF SPAIN 1158

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, TD
SUBJECT: PNM WINS LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

REF: PORT OF SPAIN A-17

SUMMARY. THE PEOPLE'S NATIONAL MOVEMENT (PNM) DECISIVELY AND PREDICTABLY WON THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS HELD IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO ON APRIL 25 AND REAFFIRMED THE SIZEABLE MANDATE WHICH THE PARTY RECEIVED IN LAST YEAR'S GENERAL ELECTIONS. THE OPPOSITION UNITED LABOR FRON (ULF) MAINTAINED ITS HOLD ON THE AREAS WHICH SUPPORTED THE NEW PARTY LAST YEAR, BUT IT DID NOT ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH ITSELF AS A TRULY NATIONAL PARTY. IN TOBAGO, THE GOVERNING PARTY REVERSED THE OUTCOME OF THE 1976 ELECTIONS BY DEFEATING THE DEMOCRATIC ACTION CONGRESS (DAC). INTEREST IN THE CAMPAIGN AND TURNOUT AT THE POLLS WERE BOTH VERY LOW, LARGELY BECAUSE THE COUNTRY AND MUNICIPAL COUNCILS ARE VIRTUALLY POWERLESS AND INEFFECTUAL INSTITUTIONS. END
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SUMMARY.

1. THE RULING PEOPLE'S NATIONAL MOVEMENT (PNM) DOMINATED THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS HELD IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO ON APRIL 25, WINNING 68 OF THE 100 SEATS AT STAKE. IN DOING SO IT RETAINED CONTROL OF A LEAST SIX OF THE COUNTRY'S TEN MUNICIPAL AND COUNTY COUNCILS AND REGAINED

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SOME OF THE SUPPORT IT HAD LOST IN TOBAGO IN LAST YEAR'S GENERAL ELECTION. IN ITS SECOND OUTING AT THE POLLS, THE OPPOSITION UNITED LABOR FRONT (ULF) MAINTAINED THE HOLD WHICH IT FIRST ESTABLISHED IN 1976 ON THE RURAL AREAS OF CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN TRINIDAD AND GAINED SOME NEW SUPPORT IN DISTRICTS ON THE EAST COAST. ULF CANDIDATES WERE ELECTED TO 27, SEATS, WHICH WILL ENABLE THE PARTY TO CONTROL AT LEAST THREE OF THE COUNTY COUNCILS. CONTROL OF THE TENTH COUNCIL, WHICH WAS EVENLY DIVIDED BETWEEN THE ULF AND THE PNM, WILL BE DECIDED LATER THIS WEEK WHEN THE TWO PARTIES WILL DRAW LOTS FOR THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE TWO INDIRECTLY-ELECTED ALDERMAN WHO WILL GIVE ONE PARTY A WORKING MAJORITY IN THE COUNCIL. THE DEMOCRATIC ACTION CONGRESS (DAC), WHICH WON BOTH TOBAGO PARLIMENTARY SEATS LAST YEAR, RECEIVED A SHARP SET-BACK IN A TWO-WAY CONTEST WITH THE PNM ON THE "SISTER ISLE" WHEN THE PNM WON SEVEN OF THE ELEVEN SEATS AND CON-TROL OF THE TOBAGO COUNTY COUNCIL, WHILE DAC TOOK THE REMAINING FOUR SEATS.

2. THE RULING PARTY CONTESTED ALL BUT ONE SEAT, WON 24 WITHOUT OPPOSITION, AND DEMONSTRATED SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT THROUGOUT THE COUNTRY. AS IT HAD IN THE GENERAL ELECTIONS, THE PNM WON RESOUNDINGLY IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF PORT OF SPAIN, SAN FERNANDO, AND ARIMA, AS WELL AS IN THE URBAN AREAS IN NORTHEN TRINIDAD. THE ULF NOMINATED CANDIDATES FOR SLIGHTLY MORE THAN HALF OF THE SEATS AND WON ONE SEAT BY DEFAULT AND 26 BY ELECTION. ONLY ONE OF THE 12 INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES WAS SUCCESSFUL, AND TOKEN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EFFORTS BY THE DEMOCRATIC LABOR PARTY (DLP) AND TAPIA GAINED ONLY TOKEN SUPPORT.

3. PREDICTABLY, THE ELECTIONS AROUSED ONLY MINIMAL INTEREST IN THE ELECTORATE, WITH 28 PERCENT OF THE ELIGIBLE VOTERS CASTING BALLOTS IN THE 75 CONTESTED ELECTIONS. THE PNM RAN A FAIRLY LOW-KEY CAMPAIGN THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, IN WHICH PRIME MINISTER WILLIAMS TOOK VIRTUALLY NO PART. THE ONE NOTICEABLE EXCEPTION WAS TOBAGO, WHERE PNM MINISTERS AND OTHER GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS MADE A STRIN PUSH IN THE CLOSING DAYS OF THE CAMPAIGN TO DEMONSTRATE THE GOVERNMENT'S INTEREST IN TOBAGONIANS AND TO BRING TOBAGO BACK INTO THE PNM CAMP. ACCORDING TO A SENIOR OFFICIAL OF THE ELECTIONS COM-MISSION WHO WAS IN TOBAGO DURING THIS PERIOD, THIS EFFORT WAS WELL-RECEIVED, AND THE OFFICIAL EXPECTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD NOW MOVE TO RESTORE A MORE NORMAL AND RESPONSIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH TOBAGO.

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4. PRIOR TO THE ELECTIONS, THE GOVERNMENT COMMITTED ITSELF TO CONSIDERING EXPANDING THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS AND TO EXTENDING SOME MEASURE OF INTERNAL SELF-GOVERNMENT TO TOBAGO. IN THE LATTER CASE, THE ELECTION RESULTS HAVE TAKEN SOME OF THE WIND OUT OF THE SAILS OF THE DAC, WHICH HAS BEEN PUSHING STRONGLY FOR HOME-RULE FOR TOBAGO. CONVERSELY, HOWEVER, THE PNM MAY NOW BE WILLING TO DELEGATE MORE AUTHORITY TO THE TOBAGO COUNTY COUNCIL SINCE THAT BODY WILL BE UNDER FIRM PNM CONTROL. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL LOOSEN TO ANY APPRECIABLE DEGREE THE TIGHT FISCAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROLS WHICH IT HAS MAINTAINED OVER LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES IN OTHER AREAS.

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00
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/049 W
----------301219Z 080681 /44
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FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
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5. COMMENT: AFTER THE EXCITEMENT OF LAST YEAR'S GENERAL ELECTIONS, THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAMPAIGN AND VOTING WENT QUIETLY. OTHER THAN THE QUESTION OF TOBAGO AUTONOMY, NO IMPORTANT ISSUES WERE RAISED. INDEED, GENERAL INTEREST IN THESE ELECTIONS WAS PRIMARILY IN THEIR TEST AND VALIDATION OF THE TRENDS ESTABLISHED IN THE GENERAL ELECTIONS A FEW MONTHS EARLIER. WITH SOME MINOR DIFFERENCES, THE OUTCOME OF THIS ELECTION WAS VIRTUALLY THE SAME AS THE 1976 GENERAL ELECTION - A GENERAL ENDORSEMENT OF THE PRAGMATIC, MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD

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POLICIES AND PERSONNEL OF THE PNM, WITH A SMALL BUT SIGNIFICANT ROLE FOR AN ACTIVE OPPOSITION. THE PNM MINISTERS WHO EVIDENCED SOME NERVOUSNESS ABOUT THE ELECTIONS AND THE "THREAT" OF THE ULF SHOULD HAVE BEEN REASSURED BY THE VOTING RESULTS.

6. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE ULF DEMONSTRATED THAT ITS PERFORMANCE IN THE GENERAL ELECTIONS LAST YEAR WAS NOT A FLUKE AND THAT THE PARTY COMMANDS FIRM SUPPORT IN ITS
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LIMITED STRONGHOLDS. THE ULF ALSO PICKED UP SOME SUPPORT ALONG THE EAST COAST, WHICH HAS A HISTORY OF GOVERNMENT NEGLECT, BUT THE PARTY DID NOT EVEN ATTEMPT TO OPPOSE THE PNM IN MANY AREAS. THE ULF DID NOT CHOOSE OR WAS NOT ABLE TO USE THE ELECTION TO ESTABLISH ITSELF AS A TRULY NATIONAL PARTY OR TO TEST THE STRENGTH OF ITS IDEOLOGICAL APPEAL. THE ELECTION ALSO DEMONSTRATED THAT NEITHER THE DLP NOR TAPIA WERE READY TO LAUNCH A SERIOUS COMEBACK TRY AFTER THEIR POORT SHOWINGS IN THE 1976 GENERAL ELECTIONS.
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